

**DCS/Section 151 Officers/Finance Officers Seminar Programme**

**Seminar 2 – Responding to cost challenge around SEND and impact on home to school transport**

**28 June 2023**

Suzanne Smith, Assistant Director for Hampshire, and IOW

Carl Edwards, independent Transformation Consultant

**Attendees:**

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| DCSs | Rachel Wardell  Lara Patel  John Macilwraith  Lee-anne Farach  Sarah Daly  Neil Hoskinson  Helen Watson  Grainne Siggins | Surrey  Brighter Futures for Children – Reading  Buckinghamshire  Medway  Portsmouth  Slough  Wokingham  Bracknell Forest |
| Finance Directors/  Section 151 | Kit Lam  Rachel Wigley  Steve Richardson  Stuart McKellar  Lisa Potts  Graham Ebers | Brighter Futures for Children – Reading  Surrey  Milton Keynes  Bracknell Forest  West Berkshire  Wokingham |
| Officers | Paul Wagstaff  Michella Sancho  Falil Onikoyi  Daniel Peattie  Helen Miall  Emma Shrimpton  Sian Headger  Louise Hoten  Angela Mann | West Sussex  West Berkshire  Buckinghamshire  Surrey  Wokingham  East Sussex  Brighton and Hove  Portsmouth |
| Presenters & Organisers | Suzanne Smith  Carl Edwards  Deborah Glassbrook  Carol Flach | Hampshire  Independent Consultant  SESLIP Consultant  BFfC Reading /SESLIP |

**Suzanne Smith**

**Presentation: School Transport Trends & Pressures**

**Key messages:**

* 192% increase in the number of EHCPs being since 2015
* 202% increase in the number of EHCPs since 2012
* The increase in EHCPs has impacted on the HNB but the connection to school transport budgets is only just being made.
* School transport costs are particularly increasing in the Post 16 and special school area (131% change in special, 318% change in Post 16/FE)
* Average cost per child – post 16 provision and special school provision costs gone up from £201 to £840 per child per year and from £315 to £809 a year.
* For post 16 transport, there are the different legislation that applies – sometimes you can charge parents and sometimes you can’t. Making changes to policy around SEND transport provision is contentious and Hampshire have been taken to judicial review on three occasions so proceed with caution!
* Inflation is impacting on unit costs but the growth in SEND has had a bigger impact.
* Market capacity is difficult with lack of drivers and specialist vehicles needed for SEND children and place for passenger assistance. MPV vehicles are the most expensive to commission.

**Actions to curtail the spend on SEND transport**

* Offer only the statutory minimum service
* More robust commissioning where possible
* Post 16 transport not free unless we have a legal duty to transport
* Changes around exclusions – only provide transport for permanent exclusions not for fixed term suspensions.
* One school one operator
* Bundle routes
* Use route planning software
* Set up safe walking routes
* Provide minibuses to schools for transport purposes and let schools use them as they want during the day.
* Use personal budgets to support family to use their own specially adapted transport and pay mileage costs
* Team, technology and processes – SEND transport teams need to use technologies to manage call enquiries to reduce staffing time on this activity.
* Developed methodology with finance colleagues and retro modelled what would our spend have been to prove savings
* Lobby locally and nationally school transport is an unfunded pressure arising from 2014 national government reforms.

**What would make a difference**

* County Councils Network and ADCS/ADEPT working together
  + Legislative change - unfunded pressures and new burdens
  + Role of health – financial contributions, currently no role in legislation for health contributions to school transport, accompanying children who need medication during transportation
  + Parental expectations – parental responsibility to attend school, ask for contributions (would save £20m if contributions made), use own vehicles and pay allowances
* New statutory guidance and new burdens – skewed towards parental preference, new burden around parental choice and councils needing to evidence that inefficient use of resources to meet parental preference – likely to lead to more work, parallel appeal processes and tribunals
* Fixed term suspensions – if transport is needed for all suspensions, then estimate a further £1m cost burden.

**Questions and Answers**

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| **Michelle Sancho**  **AD West Berkshire** | Q - Can the forecasting methodology be shared?  A – SS has done a lot of work on different forecasting models – happy to share that paper. |
| **Paul Wagstaff**  **East Sussex** | Q – note that in some cases Hampshire use secure pick up and drop off points rather than door to door pick up and drop off – is that where the judicial reviews came in?  A – the policy change around using some secure pick up and drop off points only affected around 20 cases but there is a firm of solicitors that reviews any change in SEND school transport and they supported parents with the judicial review challenge. The change in policy only formalised practice that was already taking place.  SS advised that the biggest difference to cost savings came from the one school one operator and bundling approach. |
| **Daniel Peattie**  **Surrey CC** | Q – DP noted that it can be difficult to get comparative data and benchmarking cost data.  A – SS advised that the CCN benchmarking surveys are shared with authorities and that the Association of Transport Commissioners collect data in transport.  SS noted that the unit costs in Hampshire and the IOW for different markets were about the same percentage. |
| **Paul Wagstaff** | Q – when is the DfE going to publish guidance on school transport.  A – SS advised that the latest guidance on school transport is due at the end of July. |
| **DAG** | Q – DAG asked how much consultation the DfE had undertaken prior to issuing the guidance.  A – SS noted that ADCS were not consulted so consultation seems to have been quite limited. |
| **Rachel Wardell** | Q -RW commented on the importance of language around school transport – they refer to school transport assistance and not home to school transport. Shift the message to assisting families and carers and not taking responsibility for providing it. |

**Carl Edwards**

**Presentation: An approach taken to managing demand and cost associated with EHCPS**

**Key messages:**

* When the practice is right, the money will follow – costs are mitigated by transformational change which with improve outcomes for C&YP.
* Need to mix empathy with commercial reality
* Achieve buy in, engage with stakeholders, verify transformational savings through finance and project proposals through DCS and management teams.
* Identify where the costs from EHCPs are coming from to identify where savings can be made and where to intervene.

**Underpinning principles of the plan to reduce EHCPs and cost**

* Early intervention focus
* Increase SEN support offer
* Review EHCP assessment process and thresholds
* Culture change and work with school leaders
* Thorough provision mapping with potential for more local provision

Review EHCP demand & cost by age and setting e.g., autism need and spend by age, speech, language and communication needs by age and provider (early years, mainstream, special, independent, 16+), social and emotional health spend by age and providers including alternative provision spend.

**Strategy**

1. Demand management workstream

* ASC outreach team
* SEMH outreach team
* In borough SEMH provision
* Review post 16 offer
* Threshold and annual review rigor
* Review and reform EY offer
* Workforce development

1. Commissioning / capital workstream
   * Ensure cost-effective commissioning and brokerage of services
   * Develop your own primary and secondary need Resource Units in mainstream
   * Review AP model and funding
   * Review Health contributions
   * Remodel financial support and tops ups to encourage mainstreams schools to support – review banding

Use the data in a more informed way to follow the funding.

**Questions and responses**

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| **Michelle Sancho** | Q - What kind of savings did you get to with the LA.  A –  Q – what experience did you have with the top up rates and how did that impact on demand for special schools.  A – the plan took 18 months to work through with schools – the idea was to try to future proof schools more by taking money from special schools to divert to maintained schools via additionally resourced provision. |
| **Rachel Wardell** | Q – do you have experience of going round the loop with a Local Authority more than once to find savings.  A – CE noted that he understood that the pressure of demand increasing makes findings savings tougher in each review cycle and there is a need to balance sentiment with cost. CE characterised the cost review process more as turnaround rather than best practice and commented on the need to continue to re-visit the plan and refresh the plan to meet demand needs in a consistent and persistent way. CE noted that where this has worked well in his experience is where there has been a dedicated team with funding for at least two years to work through an agreed plan and to implement without drift. |
| **Paul Wagstaff** | Q – PW commented on the need for a culture shift to take place around expectation especially with parents in early years. If early years fill specialist provision schools can’t often manage to change this relationship.  A – it was noted that Delivery Better Value is a vehicle that can be used to assist with the culture change that is needed to focus on improving maintained school confidence and providing specialist input in health, therapies e.g., SALT as part of ordinarily available provision in the mainstream.  It was noted that DBV have identified that up to 50% of children currently in special schools could have had their provision needs met in mainstream schools if we could have got the relationships with schools and parents right.  An example was given around a pilot to provide a single point of advice /advice line for professionals to assist with reducing the escalation process into EHCP assessment and specialist provision by accessing the right support whilst in mainstream provision.  PW commented on the significant culture shift that he is seeking to take place and the fact that they are working to provide an additional 500 places through their capital programme in the next 3 years and the risk that these are filled up with those who don’t need to be in special provision and then the more complex cases that do require specialist provision will end up going to independent provision with the associated extra funding and travel costs.  CE advised that demand management projects can take 6-12 months to put in place and that projects to review and agree new banding arrangements can take up to 18 months to get agreement but shifting the culture has the longest timeframe – up to 3 years and it is essential to start with the child’s journey and early years pathways. |
| **Sarah Daly** | SD advised that she is working with a group of Headteachers who are committed to inclusion and maintaining children in mainstream but asked about the challenge of finding the workforce to do outreach work and the struggle to find EPs, capacity in schools including classroom assists to keep children in mainstream.  The group discussed the need for innovation and reducing bureaucracy.  The group commented on the vital role that Health Visitors have in engaging with parents around provision and options in early years.  Disappointment with the lack of ambition form the DfE around the scope of alternative provision and SEND review was shared. Portsmouth are going to be the AP lead for SEND in region. |

**Next Steps and Future Seminars**

**Circulation list**

* Please can you update us if you know someone has moved on so that we have the most up to date circulation list for DCS and section 151 Officers.

**Evaluation**

* Please share your thoughts on what more you would like, topics, discussion areas.

**Future topics**

* Current plan is to do some work around unit costs.

***September 27th, 2023, Wed 2-4 pm presenter/s TBC.***

***November 29th, 2023 – topic to be agreed – please let us know what you would find useful. We are thinking that this will be an in-person seminar – would that work well or would you prefer another Teams session?***

**Finance sponsor**

* It would be really helpful to have a Finance sponsor for these seminars and for developing the network. Please let Alison know if you are willing and able to do that.

***Alison can be contacted on alison.jeffery@eastsussex.gov.uk***

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